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Storytelling and Performance as Dance/Movement Therapy: A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Dance/Movement Therapy

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Abstract

Inspired by a personal experience, this thesis discusses the use of storytelling and performance as dance/movement therapy. I answer these research questions: What practices, if any, exist in the field of DMT? What is the full spectrum of benefits for dancers and witnesses? What populations are best suited for this work? Non-DMT resources were chosen for their therapeutic value and adaptability to DMT contexts. I categorize the literature by these themes: “Making the Invisible Visible: Stories of Mental Illness”; “Processing Tragedy”; “Storytelling and Performance with a Social Justice Aim”; “Exploring Individuality”; “Crafted by Intuition: DMT’s Authentic Movement”; and “Physical Storytelling.” This research demonstrates that storytelling through dance and movement allows participants to convey what words cannot, and that the embodied process allows for a fuller catharsis than might be achieved through speech. Sharing one’s story of suffering can become a healing balm for others, and thereby create additional healing for the storyteller, as their story is transformed into something of *meaning*. Embodied storytelling can be used to challenge dominant discourses, uplift the oppressed, and open up difficult conversations. The same practices can be used to teach about mental health and otherwise shed light on harmful stigmas. Storytelling through dance and movement also allows for identity exploration and confidence building. The majority of practices discussed involve able-bodied adults; however, the practices might be adapted by skilled facilitators. Further research is recommended, especially around the drama therapy practice of Autobiographical Therapeutic Performance, and the therapeutic benefits of traditional/folk dance forms which are inherently storied. All in all, the DMT field has yet to take full advantage of existing practices in the field or to grab hold of what the broader dance field is modeling.

Keywords: dance/movement therapy, embodied storytelling, social justice, healing

Storytelling and Performance as Dance/Movement Therapy: A Literature Review

Introduction

There is an important story needing to come through each of us. We are longing to be seen, to be necessary.

—Toko-pa Turner

Clear thought is not a common occurrence in the world. . . . you have to listen for what they truly mean behind the words. When clear thought is seen, heard, written, it can produce aesthetic shock, because it's so simple and true; it works as a tuning fork that resonates with what is inside each of us.

—Alonzo King

My training in clinical mental health counseling and dance/movement therapy has encouraged personal engagement in the therapeutic process, as to better appreciate the work we ask of our clients. At the end of the Fall 2019 semester, I used my own therapeutic work as material for a final project. I performed a personal story through movement. While the movement was improvisational, I held a preconceived plan to move through three phases (past, present, future), as depicted in Figure 1, and support my performance with a piece of music. At the conclusion of the piece, I lifted my head to see almost everyone in tears. My peers came to embrace me, and I was taken aback as I suddenly realized the impact of my performance. They told me I had not just told my story, but I had also told theirs. The effect of my performance transcended my original intent, evolving from an individualized process to a communal one.

Figure 1*Depiction of Author's Performance*

Note. The music selected for this piece was Max Richter's "On the Nature of Daylight."

After this transformative yet brief experience, I felt a longing for more. I desired to know the utility of personal storytelling and performance within dance/movement therapy (DMT). What practices, if any, exist? What is the full spectrum of benefits for dancers and witnesses? What populations are best suited for this work? As I made my initial dive into the DMT literature, I was surprised by the lack of applicable works. This led me to expand my search into the dance field at large, consult with seasoned dance/movement therapists, and explore the offerings of related fields. Non-DMT resources were chosen for their therapeutic value and adaptability to DMT contexts. After this research journey, and eventually finding a practice in the DMT literature that answers my guiding research question, I present my findings.

The structure of my thesis is as follows: I first speak to the body as a natural source of wisdom, then offer a review of literature categorized by these themes: "Making the Invisible Visible: Stories of Mental Illness"; "Processing Tragedy"; "Storytelling and Performance with a

Social Justice Aim”; “Exploring Individuality”; “Crafted by Intuition: DMT’s Authentic Movement”; and “Physical Storytelling.” This is followed by a discussion in which I review and summarize the literature, answer my research questions, and make recommendations for further research. Concluding remarks are offered as a summation of my thoughts.

Literature Review

Dance and storytelling have a historical partnership. Since ancient civilization, dance has been a form of expression for individuals and communities (Kreitler, H. & Kreitler, S., 1972). The body is a natural source of wisdom, which makes accessing story through the body a worthwhile pursuit. We may view movement as our most innate form of communication. We came into this world without verbal language, but with beating hearts, lungs that inflated and deflated just as we needed, eyes that curiously explored their new environment, etc. Movement has been with us from the beginning. Evette Hornsby-Minor (2007) shared, “our bodies hold our stories. . . . the body remembers, and movements can reveal or capture emotionally charged moments that can be retold through the body.” Unfortunately,

The body and dance have often been the most misunderstood within many areas of scholarship, even though there has been for decades a huge dedication to critiquing the body-mind distinctions, particularly in feminist studies (Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1993; Cixous, 1993; Griffin, 1995; Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 1992; Kristeva, 1980; Leder, 1990). A proliferation of scholarship has addressed how the body has been colonized, or culturally inscribed, and dance education scholars have continued to make their mark in theorizing the connection to the body and dance as a place of knowledge and perception (Fraleigh, 2004; Hanna, 1988, 2008; Shapiro, 1999; Stinson, 1995, 2004). (Snowber, 2018, p. 247-248)

Early dance/movement therapists harnessed this connection in their work, inspiring the development of a field which continues to gain recognition around the world. Dance/movement therapists innovatively use their understanding of the mind-body connection to reach individuals when common methods fall short. For instance, dance and movement can be used to outwardly express features of one's inner world, especially those which words cannot articulate.

Making the Invisible Visible: Stories of Mental Illness

In a 2015 study, Karin Eli and Rosie Kay used contemporary dance to uncover lived experiences of having an eating disorder. Eli, a medical anthropologist, and Kay, a contemporary dance choreographer, defined their work as separate from clinical therapy (p. 64). Their intention was to supplement the current, limiting narratives around eating disorders in the medical humanities, with embodied experiences taken from personal dance choreography. (Narratives of eating disorders are typically formed from verbal or written interviews alone). Eli and Kay worked with seven women (19-31 years of age, with varied nationalities and eating-disorder experiences), over the course of eight consecutive weeks. Through skill-building/creative dance exploration, group discussions, individual interviews, and each participant's creation of a solo to perform for the group (p. 64), the participants were able to convey what would have otherwise remained unspoken about their personal experiences. A participant named Gia shared,

I find it . . . more powerful than talking . . . Because I've talked about my eating disorder, and heard other people speaking about their eating disorders, and there's a bit of a casualness about it. Whereas in dance you kind of have this full force of the reality of what would have been, could be, or is. I find that very, very disrupting to my sense of calm, and at the same time, I guess . . . one of the rare moments where I can actually be genuine or authentic. (p. 66)

A participant named Eve noticed in herself a desire to be seen and understood in the most accurate way. She shared, “I noticed that in those early stages something that kept popping up in my head was that I thought, oh, but that doesn’t express the pain strongly enough. . . . [it] seems to me to again be this kind of thing of wanting people to—see and notice and understand . . .” (p. 67). Additionally, in the witnessing of each other’s solos, participants explored their connections. A participant named Catherine said, “Sometimes I saw something of like, myself, something I related to in someone else’s dance, and I was like, I never would have even expressed it that way or I didn’t know how to express that. And then I see you do that, and I’m like, yeah, that’s it, that’s right” (p. 67). This study demonstrates that personal storytelling using movement can communicate feelings, sensations, and other aspects of one’s lived experience that are difficult or impossible to articulate in other ways, especially speech. Having an eating disorder is one such experience.

Kevin Turner, a dancer/choreographer, created a personal movement piece about living with bipolar disorder, following a severe emotional breakdown and involuntary hospitalization. Turner collaborated with three other dancers to best portray his painful experience which eventually evolved into one of acceptance and health. Two male dancers portrayed his illness, and one female dancer portrayed his sister, who was especially affected by his suffering. Titled *Witness*, his piece ended up reaching people in ways he did not anticipate (TEDx Talks, 2018, 11:50). People approached him afterwards with their own stories, and one young woman even told him, “Thank you so much for the performance. This has really made me think twice about killing myself” (11:43). Turner reflected, “I think it really allowed people the permission to be able to talk about these things” (11:25). Turner now leads workshops in schools, mental health charities, and other settings to inspire exploration of mental health through dance. Turner’s

experience with personal storytelling shows us how one's individual story of hardship can become the medicine another needs to feel less alone in theirs. We also learn that in the process of using one's suffering as a conduit for another's healing, the suffering is transformed into something good, something of *meaning*.

Dancer, teacher, and choreographer Jenny Bopp led a seven-week embodied storytelling practice for a group of five adults recovering from trauma and/or addiction. The curriculum was modeled after others used at BuildaBridge, a non-profit arts intervention organization in Philadelphia (Bopp, 2019, p. 133), along with thorough research on the effects of trauma on the body. The curriculum was designed to provide "an outlet for therapeutic release," "a way to reconnect with their bodies, and to build empathetic connections," and foster "new or revitalized hope for a future that could be" (p. 125). The seven weeks concluded with self-choreographed performances from each participant, displaying their stories and hopes for the future. Friends and family were invited to attend. The participants found using movement to tell their stories "empowering and non-threatening" (p. 141). While all are well-spoken, the option to communicate with their bodies offered new possibilities. A participant named Jessica found that she felt more *safe* being given the option to not use verbal language (p. 141). As a result of Bopp's workshop, "100% of the participants noticed an increase in their confidence, empathy, and creativity" (p. 124). While Bopp's well-developed curriculum helped her group members process difficult issues, some prefer a different approach.

Processing Tragedy

Madie Duncan, a dancer who has taken a more independent route in her healing, created a solo dance piece called *The Five Stages of Grief* in response to a recent tragedy in her life. Available for public viewing on YouTube, Duncan (2016) wrote,

It is a representation of the emotions and feelings I experienced. From denial, bargaining, anger and depression, to acceptance. . . . This video was an outlet that allowed me to let go of all of the things holding me back from accepting what had happened. I created this to not only allow myself to get through my own personal situation, but to help anyone who is going through something that they feel is almost impossible to get past.

As I watch the video, I am taken on my own journey of overcoming tragedy, and feel the cathartic release Duncan vulnerably models through honest storytelling. Several viewers expressed a similar sentiment, some even admitting to breaking down in tears. Duncan's self-choreographed performance is an intuitive creation that proved highly therapeutic for herself and her audience. Even on a digital platform, something as complex as a grief story can be translatable through movement expression.

The documentary *Still/Here* was released in 1994, showcasing segments of movement workshops Bill T. Jones led with participants battling life-threatening illnesses. Jones is a multi-award winning, world-renowned dancer and choreographer who is unafraid to speak to the difficult aspects of the human condition. The workshops culminated in a dance performance by his company, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company that reflects the movements and words of the workshop participants. Jones designed this project following his partner's (Arnie Zane's) death by AIDS, and the encounter with his own status as HIV-positive. He said, "For me as a person who has to deal with his own possible early death, I was looking for people who were dealing with the same thing. I said, 'Let's go out and deal with the people who know, who are front-line. What do you know? . . . Tell me it, show me it. And I'm gonna take it. I'm gonna make it songs, I'm gonna make it movement'" (Moyers et al., 1997, 4:00). The documentary expresses Jones's recurring message of dance/movement as liberating (18:49). Participants open

their arms wide as if to fly, punch the air to release their anger, and translate their suffering into something of significance.

However, some people misunderstood or disagreed with the concept of Jones's work. New Yorker critic Arlene Croce was so offended by Jones spotlighting the experiences of ill people that she refused to see the performance. She remarked, "By working dying people into his act, Jones is putting himself beyond the reach of criticism. . . . Jones has crossed the line between theatre and reality--he thinks that victimhood in and of itself is sufficient to the creation of an art spectacle" (Croce, 1994, p. 54). While Croce brings to light an important conversation about where to set boundaries within the performing arts, her remarks feel premature. I wonder if Croce would have expressed a different opinion had she known more of Jones's personal attachment to the work. Perhaps she was unaware that the participants agreed to the performance. April Austin (1995) of *The Christian Science Monitor* gave her remarks: "Jones succeeds in portraying the participants as lively, inquisitive, thoughtful, and courageous people. He does not paint them as victims or objects of pity, but through careful editing of the soundtrack, and of the images, he shows the wholeness of their humanity." Whether or not one might call Jones's work "victim art," an important reminder emerges from the controversy: it is not only about who speaks but also about who listens (Spivak, 1990, p. 62). Storytelling in performance is an *intersubjective process*. As such, listeners will find their own meanings, and feelings, in the work. Jones's work was motivated by his own personal narratives, but he expanded his journey to become something larger.

Storytelling and Performance with a Social Justice Aim

In 2014, Dr. Christine Caldwell, board-certified dance/movement therapist (BC-DMT), Dr. Rae Johnson, Registered Somatic Movement Therapist (RSMT), and MA Art Therapy

student, Owen Karcher, assessed the somatic outcomes of oppression (Karcher & Caldwell, 2014, p. 479). Initially an interviewee, Karcher became a vital co-researcher in the project, using his personal story as a transgender male to speak to broader issues of oppression. Caldwell and Karcher worked together to pinpoint “key somatic experiences” (p. 480) and, in collaboration with a few DMT students, create movement phrases. Karcher focused on “the constriction he felt while wearing a binder to hide his breasts, the way he felt when he was misgendered or called a slur, and the expansion and lightness he felt when he was able to disregard social messages and connect with an internal sense of self and truth” (p. 480). In combination with other expressive mediums like visual art, Karcher performed his movement story publicly in a number of settings, the intention being to enact social change. In the process of “turning data into dance” (p. 481), the researchers found that “when research examines injustice and marginalization . . . [the] research method used must itself be an embodied social action, taken as a means of redress” (p. 482). Furthermore, members of marginalized communities can find therapeutic value in the process of articulating the data and their personal experiences through expressive mediums, and presentations of data may be more transformative when performed with live audiences (p. 482).

Liz Roche Company, an Ireland-based contemporary dance group, designed a performance exploring women’s bodily autonomy in Ireland. Personal narratives were blended with social ones to address the cruel Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, (an anti-abortion amendment that has since been repealed), which prioritized the life of the fetus even when doing so was fatal to the mother (Roche, 2019, p. 6). One of the participating dancers found it helpful to view her own story in the context of others shared, in the process “encountering what she describes as ‘institutional misogyny’” (p. 7). Through community engagement and focus groups, this project provided opportunity for more stories to be shared,

perspectives to be broadened, and hope and healing to come forth (p. 6). Mira Cantrick and other dance/movement therapists shared, “The field of counseling has traditionally focused on intra- and inter- personal frameworks. . . According to Lewis et al. (2011), . . . counselors need to view client problems more contextually and use advocacy to remove oppressive environmental barriers. (p. 6-7)” (Cantrick et al., 2018, p. 198). Liz Roche Dance Company used their movement language of contemporary dance to tell personal stories within a cultural framework, allowing for burdens to be shared and solutions to be sought out.

Exploring Individuality

Lliane Loots is an additional figure who has used her professional platform to tell personal stories. After listening to bits and pieces of her dancers’ dialogues outside the dance studio, Loots (2016), the founder and artistic director of Flatfoot Dance Company, was inspired to create works based on collections of her dancers’ and her own personal stories (p. 383). While Loots was initially going to take more of a backseat in the story sharing process, her dancers insisted on her participation. Loots said, “I think the feelings of exposure and vulnerability shift if everyone participates, so that the idea of a dispassionate ‘collector’ is done away with” (p. 384). For her 2015 work, *days like these*, she and her dancers collaboratively brought to life a synthesis of their stories (p. 383).

The six dancers punched in with stories that had us laughing, crying and acknowledging our intense race, class, gender and sexual differences, while allowing us to weigh in on our shifting commonality. The telling became a cathartic process, not unlike giving testimony. Surprisingly, it became clear how many stories there were and how much (in hindsight and as the process got underway) we needed to be telling them. . . . [The] dancers and I were amazed, on the nights of the final performances, how the audience, in

an unprecedented manner, all wanted us to listen to stories they had to tell; stories that keyed into the final performance choices. The dancers and I were literally cornered by audience members after each show. It seems that we had dug into a ‘personal and cultural’ (Wall 2006: 9) need to speak and to be heard. (p. 384)

Inspired by the work of Alvin Ailey, a famous African-American dance choreographer who “used his ‘blood memories’ of growing up in Texas in his works” (Guillerman, n.d., p. 78), Sarah Guillerman, a middle school teacher at Marshall Middle School, proposed a curriculum unit around choreographing personal phrases. These phrases “reflect [the students’] exploration of the question ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Where do I come from?’” (p. 72) As the resource reviewed does not discuss the results of the course, it is difficult to assess its full impact. However, Guillerman’s stated hope was that her students would “find themselves through dance. . . . [and] find strength in sharing their experiences and perhaps a new self-confidence” (p. 79). Both Loots and Guillerman offered opportunities for the emergence of personal voice, which, as in autoethnographic performance, asks us “to embrace one another as fully as we challenge one another” (Spry, 2011, p. 54). Offering an authentic presentation of oneself can be medicinal in and of itself, especially when properly witnessed. DMT’s Authentic Movement practice exemplifies this idea, and has been considered to be translatable to autobiographical performance.

Crafted by Intuition: DMT’s Authentic Movement

In Authentic Movement practice, participants let their inner impulses guide spontaneous movement creation (Fernandes, 2012; Plevin, 2017). Typically used in a group format, the participants begin in a circle, and each moves into the circle as they are prompted. Apart from having to stay within the circle and follow safety guidelines, the movers let their bodies take over

as they follow any surfacing impulses. Some call this sensation “being danced.” Fernandes (2008) used her research to show how Authentic Movement can be translated into performance. Pesonen (2008) discussed the possibility of raw, original Authentic Movement being performance itself. Authentic Movement was also the focus of Plevin’s (2017) work, who wanted to see if movement from the practice could find meaningful form in choreography, and eventually in performance (p. 39). She stated, “Although not an objective of the project, the choreography became dances that heal through four portals of transformation: to be seen, to see oneself being seen, to be seen by the collective and to be seen in public performance” (p. 1); “what is best called transformational choreography” (p. 40).

While Authentic Movement comes from one’s raw impulses, the movements do not necessarily translate into a coherent narrative. Thus, the use of Authentic Movement in performance has not been about sharing personal stories; it has been about crafting unique movement languages for choreography, or simply forming a larger version of what Authentic Movement feels like in its usual context (being seen, seeing oneself being seen, etc.). Fernandes (2008) argued, “In dance theater’s composition, there is no need to force a rational congruency of elements in order to be coherent. Very much on the contrary, the more we change the context and overlap differences, the more the piece becomes open to various interpretations allowing a multiplicity of meanings, and empowering the main source of it all--body movement” (pp. 7-8). Fernandes made an interesting point that the more abstract a movement-based performance is, the more meanings that can emerge. In this way, stories *can* emerge. Stevenson (2019) said that “Dance tells the story of the repressed unconscious mind” (p. 18). Fernandes hinted at the idea of projection on the part of the audience, or the idea of attaching their own meanings onto what they

witness from the movement. Partners Steve Harvey and E. Connor Kelly are BC-DMTs whose work has revolved around this power.

Physical Storytelling

Harvey and Kelly have been developing Physical Storytelling (PS) for over 30 years (E. Connor Kelly, personal communication, February 23, 2021). I have been fortunate to be in correspondence with Kelly while writing my thesis. Kelly was formerly an intern of Dr. Judith Kestenberg's (founder of KMP- Kestenberg Movement Profile), and studied alongside Janet Adler (pioneer of Authentic Movement). Kelly served as both president and vice president of the New England Chapter of the American Dance Therapy Association (NEADTA), has presented at multiple ADTA (American Dance Therapy Association) conferences with her husband Harvey, and now serves as vice president of the American Dance Therapy Association of Australasia (DTAA). Kelly and Harvey currently live in Guam, where their work extends to multiple settings in and outside of the island.

The DMT practice of Physical Storytelling (PS) is distinguishable from Physical Theatre, which is choreographed theatrical performance. While PS may also be used as performance, it is primarily used in DMT group therapy or in group supervision for dance/movement therapists. Other uses include arts-based research, teaching, and ritual (E. Connor Kelly, 2020). Based on the structure of Playback Theatre, in PS the storyteller verbally shares a story, and then members of the group are chosen to spontaneously create movement based on what emerges (E. Connor Kelly, personal communication, February 26, 2021). Harvey and Kelly (2017) compare this to other improvisational movement practices like contact improvisation or DMT's Authentic Movement (pp. 2-3), which prioritize the intuition of the body over the predeterminations of the intellect. What emerges are "physical aspects that were not mentioned in a conscious way in the

original story. . . . [The] resulting physical metaphors can then stimulate active imagination within the watchers, which allows even this brief movement to represent a larger emotional experience” (p. 4). In the process of turning a simple verbal story into a metaphorical one, communication opens up “about the more complex, and often unspeakable, nature of the narrative” (p. 5). Harvey and Kelly call this “the story under the story” (p. 3).

In a group therapy context, the therapist acts as the “conductor” (Harvey & Kelly, 2017, p. 3). After a client tells their story, the conductor chooses a “score” or “overall structure for the improvisation” (p. 3) to which the selected group members move. The conductor then facilitates a verbal discussion. Sometimes there is additional art-making (e.g. visual art, poetry, etc.) for further processing. Examples of scores include: Three Stops, Three Solos, Journey, and Fairytale (Kelly, 2006; Harvey & Kelly, 2017). Each score offers containment for the improvisations, and a corresponding emergence of symbols or meanings. Schmais (1985) said, “Probably the most important feature of symbolism is that it allows for psychic distance from private preoccupations” (p. 34). Psychic distance gives opportunity for transformation and change. Sharing stories is also healing in its own right. Jo Salas shared, “Telling one’s story publicly, seeing it reflected back, realizing that it is accepted and valued by others is a healing experience for the teller. For the audience, as well, there is an integration and affirmation that strengthens the connections between them” (Fox & Heinrich, 1999, p. 29). Harvey and Kelly (2017) view attachment theory as a link to PS’s effectiveness, since PS has an ability to create psychological connectedness or an “understanding of ‘felt’ social-emotional events” (p. 4).

While the co-creators have solidified certain techniques as consistently effective, Harvey and Kelly continue to experiment and stay open to the possibilities for the work. For example, during the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, the power of PS has come through on Zoom, as

individuals from different countries are being connected. Harvey shares in reflection of the COVID project, “The main theme that keeps coming up over and over in our imagery has to do with a letting go of trust in leaders and government and news people and that sort of thing . . . and then finding some kind of more genuine connection with our world community” (E. Connor Kelly, 2020, 50:27). Harvey reads one of the participant’s reflections: “The people were listening, not to the prophets, not to the politicians, neither to the journalists nor their neighbors, but to a quieter, deeper voice inside themselves” (E. Connor Kelly, 2020, 51:28).

I consulted with Nancy Beardall and Vivien Marcow Speiser, both longtime dance/movement therapists and vital figures in the field, about the practice of PS. Referring to Harvey and Kelly, Beardall said, “they are very fine DMTs,” but otherwise knows little about PS (personal communication, February 21, 2021). Speiser said she knows the practice well but does not actively use it. She has used something comparable in her DMT Group Processes course at Lesley University (personal communication, February 21, 2021). When I asked Kelly if she knew of any other practice like PS in the DMT field, she shared,

Years ago a DMT from Ohio at the San Francisco conference in 1991 told us how innovative our work was and she had not seen anything like it in DMT. So I am unaware if there is anything similar. There are dance exploration processes I believe that explore creating personal dances but I think that is more personal and less a group process.

(personal communication, March 11, 2021)

Sarah Campbell Arnett used PS in the United States for the ADTA conference following 9/11, but there is uncertainty as to whether she or anyone else is currently using PS nationally.

Discussion

Physical Storytelling is an established storytelling/performance practice in the DMT field, yet every piece of literature I reviewed is influential in the conversation around therapeutic storytelling and performance. The non-DMT practices were chosen based on their therapeutic benefits. My resources were taken from these accessible platforms: Lesley University's collection of databases, Google Scholar, YouTube, and any sites offering free online access to applicable literature. Because of limitations around accessibility, my research is far from comprehensive. Yet, I offer a starting point for important conversation, ongoing research, and perhaps development of worthwhile practices in the field of DMT. To review, my initial research questions were: What practices, if any, exist? What is the full spectrum of benefits for dancers and witnesses that participate in this kind of practice? What populations are best suited for this work?

First, I shared how dance and storytelling have a historical partnership. Then I spoke to the wisdom of the body and use of movement as an innate form of communication. The first pieces of literature I reviewed focus on mental illness: Eli and Kay (2015) used contemporary dance to uncover seven women's lived experiences of having an eating disorder; Turner (2018) created a personal movement piece about living with bipolar disorder; Bopp (2019) led an embodied storytelling group for five adults recovering from trauma and/or addiction. Next, I discussed practices related to processing tragedy: Duncan (2016) created a dance about grief in response to a recent tragedy in her life; Jones (1997) created a dance piece based on stories of individuals battling life-threatening illnesses. After a critic labelled Jones's work as "victim art," I brought to light the importance of viewing storytelling/performance as an intersubjective process: it is not only about who speaks but also about who listens (Spivak, 1990, p. 62).

Next, I reviewed practices that were crafted with a social justice aim: Karcher (2014) worked with DMTs to perform his story as a transgender male and speak to broader issues of oppression; Liz Roche Company (2019) created a dance piece exploring women's bodily autonomy in Ireland. Then, I discussed two practices more focused on individuality: Loots (2016) created a dance piece based on her dancers' and her own personal stories; Guillerman (n.d.) has her middle school students choreograph movement phrases about their personal identities. DMT's Authentic Movement was then discussed as an option for performance (Fernandes, 2008; Pesonen, 2008; Plevin, 2017). Different perspectives uncovered the potential for AM to reveal stories, even though this is not the primary intention of AM. Finally, I reviewed the DMT practice of Physical Storytelling, developed by Harvey and Kelly. This embodied storytelling practice, based on the structure of Playback Theatre, is currently connecting individuals around the world via Zoom (E. Connor Kelly, 2020).

The benefits from these practices are vast. From my research, I found that storytelling through dance and movement allows participants to convey what words cannot. Embodied experience also allows for a fuller catharsis than might be achieved in speaking. Moving storytellers and their audience members are able to find common narratives and make empathic connections. Sharing one's story of suffering can become a healing balm for others, and thereby create additional healing for the storyteller, as their story is transformed into something of meaning. Embodied storytelling can be used to challenge dominant discourses, uplift the oppressed, and open up difficult conversations. The same practices can be used to teach about mental health and otherwise shed light on issues that are overly stigmatized. Storytelling through dance and movement allows one to explore identity and build self-confidence, as well as explore each other's differences. In Physical Storytelling, a narrative's deeper meanings can be drawn

out of an individual story. When executed well, this vulnerable experience can connect individuals even through digital platforms.

Other than Guillerman's work with middle school students, each practice I discussed involved able-bodied adults. When interviewing Harvey about what populations Physical Storytelling can be used with, he said that a skilled therapist can adapt PS to just about anyone (personal communication, March 28, 2021). Further research is needed to uncover populations other than able-bodied adults who would benefit from the practices discussed, or others yet to be discovered. Many of the participants discussed are also trained dancers, which certainly impacts the aesthetic quality of their presentations. Aside from Karcher's performance for Naropa University's Somatic Arts Concert and various conferences, the dancers were the only ones to perform their pieces for large, public audiences. The other performances, such as those around eating disorders, were offered in more intimate settings, which was fitting for their group therapy-like nature.

Recommendations for Further Research

The DMT field may benefit from adopting techniques used by drama therapists. The drama therapy field has a well-researched and regularly used embodied storytelling practice called ATP, or Autobiographical/Autoethnographic Therapeutic Performance (Pendzik et al. (Eds.), 2016, p. 9). This is a practice in which a performance is crafted from personal material and "conceived with a therapeutic aim" (p. 8). ATP is a generic term used by practitioners to refer to several variations of self-referential performance; these are discussed in depth in the text, *The Self in Performance: Autobiographical, Self-Revelatory, and Autoethnographic Forms of Therapeutic Theatre*. ATP has been shown to bring about change, meaning-making, and healing (Emunah R., 1994; Jacques, J.-F., 2020; Pendzik et al. (Eds.), 2016).

Thorough research has illuminated elements that make ATP effective as a therapeutic tool: the embodied process (Jacques, 2020, p. 1), the interpersonal processes between performer and witness (p. 1), and the “optimal aesthetic distance” created from transforming real life material into a theatrical display (Wood, 2018, p. 23).

The approach is essentially based on three assumptions: (a) The act of “storytelling” aspects of our lives generates more coherent self-narratives, which may help to better integrate and cope with traumatic life events (White and Epston, 1990; McAdams, 2008). (b) Transforming these narratives into live performances challenges individuals to take concrete and embodied actions that may help to solidify constructive self-narratives (Emunah et al., 2014; Pendzik, 2016) and to consolidate the repaired experience as a long-term memory item (Yaniv, 2014). (c) Performing in front of an audience validates the alternative narratives created, giving them a public scope that intensifies their healing potential (Sajnani, 2012, 2016; Emunah, 2015, 2016). (Ray & Pendzik, 2021, p. 2)

Likewise, techniques used by narrative therapists may be adopted/adapted by dance/movement therapists. For example, in Restored Script Performance clients “identify new descriptions of their own identity and move from problem-saturated stories to alternative stories and unique outcomes” (Pendzik et al. (Eds.), 2016, p. 141). As drama therapists often incorporate narrative therapy principles, overlaps will naturally emerge from the research. Further research is also recommended around populations not discussed in this thesis, as well as practices yet to be uncovered in the existing literature.

Research could address traditional/folk dance forms which are inherently storied, and the therapeutic value they offer in the communities to which they belong. For example, Greek traditional dance has been shown to benefit older adults’ quality of life. One research study

reported a reduction in anxiety, psychological distress, and fatigue in elderly individuals who participated in Greek traditional dance (Mavrovouniotis, Argiriadou, & Papaioannou, 2010). The Native Hawaiian dance form, Hula, has been studied for its holistic health benefits. Special focus has been placed on the use of Hula for cardiovascular disease prevention and management (Look, et al., 2014; Maskarinec, et al., 2014).

Additionally, there is considerable research on the therapeutic uses of Indian classical dance forms. Kanaka Sudhakar's 1994 book, *Indian Classical Dancing: The Therapeutic Advantages*, is an excellent starting point for research gathering. Dr. Arpita Chatterjee (2013) wrote about the connections in an article for the *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. R-DMTs Ruta Pai (2020) and Harshita Barghava (2020) wrote their Master's theses on the topic as well, focusing specifically on adaptations for DMT contexts. A YouTube video titled *India dance to heal* shows how Indian classical dance has been used to help victims of violence and trafficking (Al Jazeera English, 2009). In her 2010 TEDx Talk, Sharon Lowen discussed the power of storytelling through Indian classical dance. She shared, "The dances in India evolved out of a spiritual consciousness. . . . The aim is transformational. The aim is that when you see a performance, you are going to come out slightly different, on a slightly higher level" (TEDx Talks, 2010, 4:12).

These are just a handful of other cultural dance forms with storytelling roots: African griotic dance; Native American hoop dance; Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino folk dances; Australian Aboriginal dance; and various Latin dance forms, such as Salsa. Socio-cultural unity is a likely benefit from all of these, but further research is required to differentiate the benefits unique to each form. In research, these practices should also be distinguished from any Eurocentric adaptations.

Conclusion

Humans have an innate need to be seen, heard, and understood as their authentic selves, within their authentic narratives. In the practice of storytelling through dance and movement, one's voice is made loud and one's feelings honored; sometimes the "unspoken" speaks louder than words. For those who have been severely wounded psychologically or otherwise, the "unspoken" can be a more natural avenue for expression and cathartic release. "Often, those who have experienced trauma find verbal communication about their experience difficult and potentially re-traumatizing. Dance and movement, among other art forms, offer opportunities for someone to tell their story without having to find words" (Bopp, 2019, p. 124).

Individuals make sense of their world through the stories they live. And while stories are unique to the individuals they belong to, common threads are found between them, uniting people in a way that makes the human experience less lonely. While the literature suggests a range of therapeutic benefits related to the use of embodied storytelling and performance, the DMT field has yet to take full advantage of existing practices in the field, or grab hold of what the broader dance field is modeling. I hope dance/movement therapists and other somatic healing practitioners will *pay attention* to the usefulness of this work, for themselves, their clients, and their communities. As leaders, when we give attention to our own wounds, we develop a greater capacity to assist others in their suffering. Consider the *wounded healers* from the literature discussed. Such are the leaders who are courageous enough to be vulnerable and show us that more can come out of a wound than a sad story.

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